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Mormonism and Anthropology

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Abstract: Discusses the intent of archaeology, anthropology, and biology in providing evidences to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon.

Truth is more important than proof when one considers . . .

Mormonism and Anthropology



*The Grain God**

an intimate knowledge of man and the way he acts must be at our command.

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.

Under such a broad field of study as anthropologists have defined for themselves, they must of necessity work in close cooperation with many other disciplines. For this reason, the anthropologist is interested in archaeology, psychology, sociology, biology, linguistics, ethnology, and any other field of inquiry that will give him clues as to the true nature of man. Among these other fields of inquiry we could list religion. The coordination of religious truths with anthropological data helps to give us a clearer and more complete answer to some of the problems of man and his related world. Here are some specific examples, then, of how anthropology has contributed and will in the future contribute to a greater understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Man, unlike animals which can rely greatly on

(For Course 9, lesson of December 17, "Moroni, the Last of the Nephites"; for Course 15, lesson of December 31, "Moroni's Farewell"; for Course 29, lesson of December 17, "A World Religion"; and of general interest.)

*The above sketch is of one feature found in an ancient stone carving that probably depicts Lehi's dream. See a report by Dr. M. Wells Jakeman on the Stela 5 stone from Izapa, Chiapas, Mexico.

ANTHROPOLOGY is often defined as "the science of man." Its aims have always been to discover the nature of man himself, a problem which is more complicated and varied than problems in any other science. The very quest of anthropology is Mormonism, for if we are ever to live up to the possibilities outlined for us in Section 132:20 of the Doctrine and Covenants, then

their instincts, must learn a great number of cultural habits which are as indispensable to him as instincts are to animals. In fact, man could no more survive deprived of his culture than culture could survive without man. This cultural education begins at birth and is passed from generation to generation through the family. The continuation of the body of cultural tradition is as important to man as propagation of the race itself. There is no social institution as ideally situated as the family for teaching the children the basic cultural patterns they will have to learn in order to survive. Neither school, church, club, nor nursery is a reliable nor adequate substitute.

Any parent who shirks the responsibility of teaching his child the desirable cultural patterns of the society in which he lives is contributing to the destruction of his offspring. Attitudes of "I'll let him grow up and choose for himself," are folly and have done much to contribute to present-day social disorganization. The foregoing is not new to Latter-day Saints. Our prophets have been emphasizing the importance of home and family for many years. This is another in a long list of cases where our prophets and teachers have been vindicated by the findings of science.

The missionary program is another area in which anthropology can be of great service to the Church. The customs, manners, habits, and culture of the people among whom we preach, even in the United States, are often very different from our own. In fact, Mormonism is a peculiar culture with distinctive customs and ways of life that have to be learned if anyone is to be successful in his conversion to it. Our missionaries are continually admonished to love and understand the peoples among whom they work. This can be done only if the missionary understands and respects the customs that to him may seem strange. A Mormon anthropologist cannot hope to anticipate the field of labor nor the peculiar circumstances to which any of our young men or women will be called. He can, however, point up the differences between cultures and give our young men and women a broader outlook and greater tolerance for other

peoples. This is not to suggest that any of our doctrine nor our principles be compromised; but rather, with a better understanding of the peoples among whom they work, our missionaries can do a more effective job.

Archaeology, a discipline very closely related to anthropology, has been receiving more and more attention among Church membership, especially in its relation to the Book of Mormon. As members of the Church, we accept that the book is true while, on the other hand, the world generally believes it to be false. This fundamental difference in viewpoint makes it easy for the LDS Church member to see certain correspondences between the book and archaeology that most scholars can explain in another way. Will the world then not accept our "proof" of the Book of Mormon? Or, what really constitutes "proof" of the book? Only the witness of the Spirit as promised by the Lord in *Moroni* 10:4, 5:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

All else that we might discover scientifically about the Book of Mormon should be classified as evidence. Here is where we all too often make the mistake of looking for proof when we should be looking for truth. Proof is many things to many people and is not necessarily the same as truth. Our first interest should be the search for truth and we should then let the chips fall where they may. Of this we can be sure. The chips will not fall against the Book of Mormon, because it already has its truth proven by the witnesses, the blood of the Prophet, and the testimony of the Spirit. They may fall, however, against some among us who cast aside the objective approach to truth and have grasped at every archaeological shadow in an effort to "prove." Let proof rest with the Lord and let us continue His commanded search after truth.

Wherein, then, lies the value of archaeological and anthropological investigations of the Book of Mormon? There are two main benefits derived from discoveries in these fields. *First*, they constitute "signs which follow them that believe." In other words, after we have received the testimony given by the Holy Ghost, we are privileged to recognize the additional evidence furnished by the sciences. As mentioned before, these additional signs or evidences are not generally recognized by persons other than Latter-day Saints, since there are other explanations acceptable to individuals who do not believe the book to be true in the first place. No amount of dogmatism on our part will necessarily change that belief. *Second*, these investigations may arouse interest in much the same way as the MIA activity programs or the Tabernacle Choir have aroused the interest of many individuals to the point where they seriously investigate our doctrine. And we must remember that like the above programs and also in the case of missionary work, the book must convert on the basis of the testimony of the Spirit and not on the archaeology. For if the testimony is not based on the spiritual witness, then the results are the same as those of individuals converted to the missionary and not to the doctrine.

After reading one of several books published by Church members on this subject, some have said: "I just don't see how anyone could read that book and not see that the Book of Mormon is true." They forget that, unlike themselves, others have not had the witness of the Spirit and consequently fail to see the same meanings, the same correlations, and the same evidences that are being revealed to the member who has had the faith to investigate, has submitted to the test through prayer, and has received his answer through the witness of the Holy Ghost.

—Dee F. Green.*

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